

MEMORIAL

OF

THE SAVANNAH CHAMBER OF COMMERCE,

AND OF

CITIZENS OF SAVANNAH,

PRAYING

The removal of obstructions to the navigation of the Savannah river.

JANUARY 3, 1846.

Referred to the Committee on Commerce, and ordered to be printed.

To the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled :

The memorial of the Savannah chamber of commerce and sundry citizens of Savannah,

RESPECTFULLY SHOWETH :

That, previous to the revolutionary war, ships drawing 18 feet water could be navigated to this city; and that during the war, for national defence, vessels and other obstructions were sunk in the channel of the Savannah river, which reduced its depth to 12 feet.

The deposition of Mr. Broughton, who acted as pilot on the Savannah river soon after the war, establishes these facts, confirmed by the testimony of his predecessors and cotemporaries in the pilotage.

The Georgia Gazette, a newspaper of the day, in No. 462, January 24, 1776, states "the arrival at Tybee of his Britannic Majesty's ships the Syren, Captain Forneux, of 28 guns, from England; the Raven, Captain Stanhope, of 18 guns, from Boston; the Tamer, Captain Thornborough, of 20 guns; and the Cherokee, Captain Ferguson, of 8 guns, from Charleston. Since their arrival a schooner has been sunk on Bryan's bank, to prevent any of them getting up to town, and many of the inhabitants of this place have moved their effects into the country."

MacCall's History of Georgia, vol. 2, p. 61, mentions the fact that "At that time the Syren, Raven, Tamer, and Cherokee, British armed ships, were lying at Tybee, at the mouth of Savannah river. A schooner was sunk at Bryan's bank to prevent their getting up to town, and many of the inhabitants removed with their effects into the country."

Drayton's Memoirs of the American Revolution, vol. 2, chap. 14, p. Ritchie & Heiss, print.

205, says: "About the 18th or 20th January, 1776, the provincial Congress of Georgia took into custody his excellency Sir James Wright, with the view of preventing his intrigues, and as a hostage against hostilities from the British vessels of war. They sunk hulks for preventing the approach of the shipping, and erected a battery at the Trustees' Garden."

Botta's History of the War of Independence, vol. 2, book 12, p. 204, says: "On the 1st September, 1779, Count d'Estaing made his appearance upon the coast of Georgia, with twenty ships of the line; General Prevost, the British commander in Georgia, was then at Savannah, with only part of his troops. At sight of so pressing a danger he sent express for Colonel Maitland, who commanded at Port Royal island, to rejoin him with all possible celerity. The vessels at anchor in the Savannah river were removed higher up, to secure them from the fire of the enemy, or sunk to obstruct his passage; other impediments for the same purpose were planted in the river."

In Gordon's American Revolution, vol. 3, p. 326, September 14th, 1779, it is stated: "As the French frigates approached the bar, the Fowey and Rose, of 20 guns each, the Keppel and Germaine, armed vessels, retired towards the town. The battery on Tybee was destroyed. To prevent the French frigates getting too near, the Rose and Savannah, armed ships, with four transports, were sunk in the channel, a boom was laid across it, and several small vessels were also sunk above the town."

Smith's Military Repository, p. 289, states: "That the British sunk the Rose and Savannah, armed ships, with four transports, across the channel below the town, to prevent the French ships from coming up higher; and above it laid a boom across, to prevent fire rafts being sent down."

MacCall, in his History of Georgia, vol. 2d, page 256, states: "The French frigates moved up within gun-shot of the town, and compelled the British armed vessels to take shelter under the battery. To prevent these frigates from coming so near as to aid the operations by land, the ships Rose, Savannah, and four transports, were sunk in a narrow part of the channel, three miles distant from the town. Some small crafts were sunk above the town, and a boom stretched across the channel to prevent the galleys which passed up the North river, round Hutchinson's island, from assailing them in that direction. One of the frigates and two galleys anchored near the wrecks; but to no purpose at so great a distance." At another period, on the attack of Savannah, by Col. Campbell, of the British army, who took the city in 1778, when Gen. Howe commanded the Americans, your memorialists are informed that other wrecks were sunk to prevent the approach of Sir Hyde Parker's fleet; but they have not been able, as yet, to find a record of it.

MacCall, volume 2d, page 168, states: "The transports were escorted by a squadron of the fleet under the command of Commodore Sir Hyde Parker. On the 27th December, 1778, they crossed the bar, and came up to Cockspur island. Having made arrangements for landing, the 'Vigilant,' man-of-war, the Keppel, brig, the Greenwich, sloop-of-war, and the Comet, galley, came up the river with a strong tide and favorable breeze, followed by the transports in three divisions. About five o'clock in the afternoon of the 28th, the Vigilant opened the reach at Four Mile point, and was cannonaded by the American galleys Congress and Lee without much effect." These statements, which are undeniable, clearly establish the facts of the sinking of the wrecks, and, of consequence, the injury

to the river. The fact of the sailing up of frigates and sloops-of-war, and the necessity of an artificial obstruction to the approach, is irresistible evidence that there was no natural obstruction.

A comparison of the depth of water, then of 18 feet, with that of some years after, of 12 and 13 feet, and now of $13\frac{1}{2}$ to $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet, caused by improvements by the commissioners of pilotage, is positive proof of the injury done to the navigation of the river.

The minutes of the board of commissioners of pilotage state that in 1800, twenty-four and twenty-one years after the sinking of those wrecks, \$9,000 were paid for removing three of those wrecks out of the channel. This did not remove the difficulty, as the current of the river passes through several channels, and its alluvial deposits (which are very great) had been checked, and had formed during that time a bank in the main channel greatly obstructing navigation. For an appropriation of at least \$70,000, the amount estimated by the engineer as necessary to remove this bank, or deepen the water near by, and return a portion of the water, which has been forced from it by the wrecks, back to this channel, your memorialists approach your honorable body.

These obstructions can be removed or remedied, and the government at Washington has undertaken at various times to accomplish it. It has now an officer of the Topographical Engineer Corps, Capt. John Mackay, detailed in part for that purpose, who has taken soundings, made a chart of the bottom of the river, and formed a plan for deepening the channel; this plan has been presented to, and approved of by, the Topographical Engineer Department; but no appropriation has been since made to carry it into effect, nor of late have any means been used to relieve the navigation of the Savannah river from the effects of the obstructions before detailed.

Your memorialists feel that Savannah is justly, legally, and constitutionally entitled to relief in this matter, because the obstruction was created by an act of general defence; first by the Americans to prevent the approach of the English fleet, and afterwards increased, during the same war, by the English, against a French fleet, which assailed the British at the instance of the American authorities. (See Gordon's History of the American Revolution, vol. 3, page 325; Ramsay's United States, vol. 2, page 301; Botta, vol. 2, book 12, pages 203 and 204; MacCall, vol. 2, pages 242 and 243.) And your memorialists conclude that the government is bound, under these facts so clearly stated, to remove the obstacles.

"The measure of sinking those wrecks was sanctioned by the authorities constituted at that crisis, and was justified by the supposed emergency, and was not a departure from the ordinary mode adopted on such occasion. Not forty miles from Washington, where your honorable bodies now sit in legislation, in the Chesapeake, were vessels during the last war sunk, opposite Fort McHenry, to prevent the approach of the British to Baltimore, and which, as the records of Congress will show, had long since been raised by the government by means of an appropriation for that object of \$250,000. In every instance, when, in the course of national defence, it became necessary to take or destroy property, to burn a house, lay waste a field, or commit any other devastation, the government had never hesitated a moment to compensate for the loss; and wherein does

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